

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 21, 2010

The Honorable Todd J. Zinser
Inspector General
U.S. Department of Commerce
Herbert C. Hoover Building
1401 Constitution Ave., N.W.
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Mr. Zinser:

Recent media reports in Chicago raise serious questions about how federal grant money is being spent in Cook County. These reports indicate a pattern of misuse and mismanagement that warrant a full investigation by your office.

On May 18, 2010, Fox News reported that Cook County Board President Todd Stroger issued eight contracts using federal Census funds, each worth \$24,995, to "businesses" that didn't exist until just before they received this money. The report notes that four of the recipients used the same attorney to file incorporation documents just days before winning their contracts.

The Fox report found that one of the contracts went to a modeling agency. Another went to a company known as "Citymerge," run by Prentiss Harris, a rap artist and convicted felon. One of the addresses listed on the Citymerge contract is a vacant lot, and another leads to a home of a woman who doesn't know Prentiss Harris or anything about Citymerge.

These contracts appear to follow a pattern of alarming misuse of federal funds. In 2008, an investigation into a program funded by Homeland Security known as "Project Shield" found "bankrupt companies, phony addresses, and falsified documents." The report also alleged that money was directed to politically connected businesses. The Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General is currently investigating Project Shield.

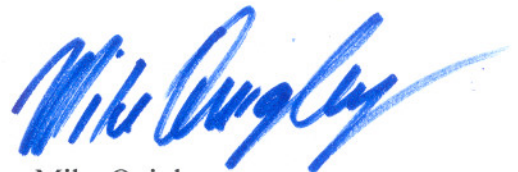
We believe your office should conduct a complete investigation of these reports to ensure that the interests of the taxpayer are protected. We have enclosed a copy of the report for your reference.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Mark Steven Kirk
Member of Congress



Mike Quigley
Member of Congress